meet. We have got to have an education that will make people willing and able to think fairly and honestly. We have got to have a school system that brings up a generation better able to think without prejudice, better able to think more broadly. We who have to do with education have got to make a school system that will do that.

Life is being stifled. We have got to take care of richness of life in a way that we haven't done hitherto. We have got to have a new and more satisfactory way of seeing life as a whole, the wholesness of it, the soundness of it. We have got to have a new vision.

I repeat: We are living at a time different from any time in the world's history and we face, therefore, an unknown future; we have a number of very specific problems not yet solved; and we have got to be honest with ourselves, recognize the task, go to work at it more seriously. Otherwise, the results may not be good.

WILLIAM H. KILPATRICK

WHY BE A PURIST?

NOTE: When this paper was first presented to a normal-school faculty, the school newspaper misprinted the title "Why be a Puritan?" Take your choice. The thought is largely influenced by Mr. Sterling Leonard. See his "Old Purist Junk" in the *English Journal* (7:295).

ENGLISH teachers and critics are usually divided into two camps, purists and others. I started in one and landed in the other, so I've seen the warfare from both sides. As my father was well-grounded in Goold-Brown's grammar and was an excellent old-time grammarian, I belonged by training to the strait-laced purists. I can remember at the age of twelve a difference of opinion with a tomboy playmate who said to me in scorn at my prissy pronunciation of a word, "Aw—who wants to talk like the dictionary? I'd rather talk like other people." I remember being scandalized in my senior year at college by Professor Krapp's liberal text, "Modern English"; I remember also my instructor's amusement at my vehement insistence on fixed rules and his remark, "All right; you go down to Connecticut and make those people stand 'round!" Whether it was Connecticut or Columbia that cured me, I have forsaken the camp of the purists for that of sensible liberals, and I'm mighty thankful for the ability to change my mind.

A purist, according to Mr. Webster, is one over solicitous about purity or nicety, especially in language. Purists are usually pedantic, and the dictionary says a pedant is one "with booklearning or the like who lacks ability or judgment to make proper use of his knowledge, or shows that he overrates mere knowledge; one who emphasizes trivial details of learning." George Meredith says, "A pedant thoughtfully regards a small verbal infelicity and pecks at it like a domestic fowl." The purists often remind one of the solemn medieval deliberations over the question of how many angels could stand on the point of a needle.

In the field of English language the purist makes himself felt in matters of spelling, pronunciation, grammar, usage, word choice, and style. Most rhetorics, composition texts, and handbooks of usage are fortified strongholds of purists—fortified, that is, against the moving pageant of everyday progress in language.

The fundamental fallacy of the purists is their attitude towards language as a fixed and static abstraction bounded by logical rules and governed by theory. This is to deny the daily evidence of our senses and experience. He who is not conscious of constant change and fluidity in our language is like one impervious to changes of fashions in dress. We no longer drink out of our saucers nor pronounce tea like tay; yet both these customs were in good repute in earlier days. The purist is often conscious of changes but deplores them, wishing to dam the refreshing tributaries of popular speech and trying to make the stream of living language into a stagnant pond.

But, you ask, are there to be no limits

at all, no standards of excellence? Who is to decide what is the best usage? The best usage, it is commonly agreed, is the usage of the best educated speakers and writers. The purists agree to this, but instead of constant research to find out changing usage, they merely copy old rule books and early rhetorics; they insist on thinking of language theoretically as they wish it to be instead of as it is. As some one has said, "They insist on the mannerisms of a bygone age, hold up Addison to the twentieth century as a model, and try to develop a Johnsonese style," The present day dictionary makers are the surest recorders of usage (the new Winston dictionary says "actual living use"), and our literary magazines, best newspapers, and educated speakers are the surest authorities as to the best usage in the making.

Murray's Oxford English Dictionary, accepted by scholars as sound authority based on thorough research, has in the preface a division of the levels of language into two great classes, literary and colloquial, with common or everyday speech between the two. This authority says, "A great body of words whose Anglicity is unquestioned is divided with equal honors between literary and colloquial, with more or less disputed purlieus about each." Webster says, "There are several styles of speech, any one of which may properly be adopted, according to circumstances. Actors, clergymen, orators, in an effort to impart great clearness and carrying power to their words, cultivate a style of enunciation that would be considered artificial, pedantic, or affected if used in ordinary conversation." Even Doctor Johnson said, "Of English as of all living tongues there is a double pronunciation, one cursory and colloquial, the other regular and solemn."

It is hard to resist a certain enjoyment when the purist falls from grace. A pernickety English teacher who was always careful to say "I think not" instead of "I don't think," who was occasionally "ill" but never "sick," habitually said "in back of"—an utter outlaw from the purist camp. Have you ever known anyone like this?—

A teacher in High of our town
Bent her brow in a scholarly frown
And observed with a sigh,
"Between you and I,
How these children misuse the pronoun!"[1]

The purist assumption that formal literary language is the only correct kind is entirely unwarranted. A teacher told me she had said to her normal-school class, "How can you, if you expect to be teachers, misuse your own language so dreadfully? I heard one of you say she had *lots* of work to do. Find out what the word *lots* means and use it correctly."—Now the example in Webster of this informal use of *lots* is taken from Henry James: "Lots of my mother's people have been in the navy." Furthermore, this teacher more than once used *lots* colloquially in conversation when off duty.

Speech is a medium of communication, a revelation of personality. Formality in speech and manner is a matter of the temperament of the speaker, the purpose of the speech, and the occasion for the speech. The formality and precision urged by the purists is often an affectation if adopted by young people today. Professor Krapp says,[2] "The worst possible speaking voice is that of one who tells you with every word he utters that he has a well-trained voice." Mr. H. G. Wells describes one of his characters as having "a kind of ignoble and premeditated refinement in her speech and manner." The purists shrink from seeing life as it is; they try like the Victorians to ignore what they disapprove. One of them writes, "Unfortunately we have with us a large class of persons who speak without thinking how our words are spelled and who therefore squeeze all the juice out of speech by re-

[1] Mary Meade Jones in *The English Journal* (Vol. 12, page 97).

[2] *English Journal* (Vol. 7, page 87). The Improvement of American Speech.

fusing to utter all the niceties of sound that the word contains." Professor Krapp retorts, "But who does talk this way? Is the juice of the language in spelling?" and he adds, "Speech that is too good for human nature's daily food is too good to be true."[3]

I paraphrase from the preface of Webster's New International Dictionary, the unabridged edition: Italian a, as the a sound in the word father, occurs most often before r. Webster adds that it is also used by some American and many English speakers in such words as ask, path, bath, calf, half, etc. Most Americans, however, employ in these words either a transition sound or the a in am. The transition sound (often called short Italian) is useful as being a compromise between the Italian a which by many is considered affected in this class of words and the a as in am.—This is a very different matter from insisting that the extreme ah sound in half and aunt is the only correct pronunciation.

An adoption of the extreme ah sound or the yew sound of u is usually an insincerity unless it is the result of early training. A personal preference is, of course, legitimate and is a matter for individual decision. The harm comes when that preference is imposed on other people. A teacher may say to a class, "I like this sound better," "I prefer this form to that"—but she has no right to lay down as law any unsupported preference.

There are two very real dangers in teaching purism to young people. First, there is the probability of losing the confidence of students. When they find they have been taught the untruth that autoMObile is the only correct pronunciation or that judgment is the only correct spelling, they begin to doubt the teacher. They doubt further when they find the teacher advocating a usage contrary to the custom of well-educated people, such as the use of the word *barn* to mean a storehouse for grain, never a place where horses are kept, or the dictum of a journalism teacher (quoted to me by a student): "You mustn't say a man is *quite* ill until he is dead." Their confidence in the teacher's wordly knowledge disappears when they are taught usage contrary to real-life experience as in the case of the purist doctrine that one must speak always with formality and preciseness if one is to speak correctly, and that one must never indulge in colloquialisms.

Shall we then ignore the question of divided authorities? By no means. When usage is divided, tell the students that one form is conservative and the other "may make them uncomfortable among conservative people," in the words of Mr. Leonard. Tell them one form is better than the other, not that one form is right and the other wrong. Tell them the truth!

The second menace is a disordered perspective concerning language. The attention is focused on minute distinctions which may or may not be authoritative, until there is no time left for the most flagrant errors and the vital task of breaking up years of really incorrect English habits. In the usual teaching experience there are so many serious errors that there is little time for finical and minute stylistic details. The teacher may herself prefer the long sound of u in the word duke, but shall she drill the students in saying dyewk when they persist in saying Febyewary? These two constructions were found on the same paper: "I would of went" and "I want to try and do." —Which should the teacher have corrected?

This brings me to the final count against the purists: their serious errors in usage and doctrine.

Research shows that *try and* was used by Milton, Dr. Johnson, and others; it is cited by the Oxford dictionary in the phrase *try and do. Got,* meaning to be in possession of, is given by Webster and is not new, for

[3]Ibid.

the example, "Thou hast got the face of a man" is from Herbert.

None are is sanctioned by Webster as follows: "As subject *none* with the plural verb is the commoner construction." Note Webster's use of the comparative *commoner* instead of *more common. Quick* and *slow* are given in dictionaries as adverbs.

We may well clear away the debris of illiteracy, but the fresh tributaries of changing usage should be encouraged to flow freely into the sparkling water of our progressing language.

Why be an obstructionist?

CARRY BELLE PARKS

THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY*

IN THE spring of 1884, while I was still a first-year student at the University of St. Andrews, my old schoolmaster, George Clark, showed me the first part of a "New English Dictionary on Historical Principles," which had just been published. It interested me, for even then I had begun the study of the older periods of English, but I little dreamed that the new Dictionary was in later years to play so important a part in my own life. My first direct contact with the preparation of the Dictionary came in 1892, when the Provost of Oriel took me one day to see Dr. Murray at work in his Scriptorium. A visit to this is an experience which is remembered with interest by many a scholar from various countries. One of these has left on record that when he was about to visit England for the first time he was told that there were two things he must see,—the British Museum and the Scriptorium. He saw both, but the modest dimensions of the latter came with rather a shock to him, after the stately spaciousness of the Museum.

When, in 1897, as much by accident as anything else, I became directly associated with the work of the Dictionary, it had already been nearly forty years on the way, for it was towards the end of 1857 that the Philological Society conceived the idea of undertaking such a work. The story of how the idea was developed by successive editors until it became possible to issue the first section in February, 1884, has been told more than once, and need not be repeated here. Forty-five years of continuous labour, at first with one, and finally with four editors, have been required to bring the work to completion, from the date at which the preparation of printer's copy began in real earnest.

The reason why so much time has been required to reach the goal lies in the plan of the work. Ordinary dictionaries of any language, which confine themselves to matters of pronunciation and definition, are usually based on preceding works of the same character, and require more or less time to produce according to the amount of revision they receive and the additions made to the vocabulary. For a dictionary on historical principles much preparation is required before the actual work can be begun. In the present instance, fully twenty years were spent in the mere collecting of materials from English literature and records of all periods, and even this had to be very largely supplemented during the later progress of the work.

The method of collecting this material was in the main as follows. The person who undertook to read a book for the Dictionary sat down provided with a large number of clean slips of paper, usually of uniform size. To save time in writing, the date, the author, and the title were frequently printed on these slips beforehand, so that only the page or reference had to be added. Thus, supposing that the work to be read was Spenser's *Faerie Queen,* the reader would copy out five or six times over on separate